

7-12-1985

Earl Bodie oral history interview by Milly St. Julien, July 12, 1985

Earl Bodie (Interviewee)

Milly St. Julien (Interviewer)

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Bodie, Earl (Interviewee) and St. Julien, Milly (Interviewer), "Earl Bodie oral history interview by Milly St. Julien, July 12, 1985" (1985). *Digital Collection - USF Historical Archives Oral Histories*. Paper 5.
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EARL BODIE

St. Julien: Today I am speaking with Mr. Earl Bodie, the Business Manager for the St. Pete/USF campus, for the USF Silver Anniversary Oral History Project. Mr. Bodie, what was your first contact with USF, what made you decide to come here, and what were your first impressions of the campus?

Bodie: My first contact with USF was in May of 1965. I worked for FICUS, which was the Florida Institute for Continuing University Studies, and they could take over this site here, where the University was, in June of 1965. We met with them several times in preparation for that. That's how I became involved with the University. It wasn't that I looked at the University and thought I should work here. It was just that they took over the place where I worked.

St. Julien: You had been here before . . .

Brodie: I had been on what is now this campus back in 1944 as a seaman with the Maritime Service and I was only here for three weeks of training in that time. I kind of liked this place and I thought it would be great to get back to St. Petersburg someday. I really never thought I would do that except that I went to work for DuPont in South Carolina, and I met an engineer there on this project where I worked. He quit this job back there and decided to open a business in St. Petersburg. After he was here for three years he had asked me to come with him to St. Petersburg because he remembered me from back there. So when I came down here I was associated with him for about six years before coming over here.

St. Julien: So you were here at the Maritime Center before the University opened. When you started working for the University, I understand that you went from the FICUS to here. Would explain about FICUS?

Brodie: The Florida Institute was under the Board of Regents just as the universities are. It was separate from the universities. Their responsibility was to have off campus classes. This would be in small towns all over Florida. We had about 240 classes that were held in high schools and other places where they could get meeting sites. Of course our job was kind of a logistical job in that we coordinated the instructors coming from the various universities to these off campus classes. My particular job in the beginning was furnishing textbooks to these off campus classes. So this was formed by an act of the legislature and it was dissolved the same way. That happened on June the 30th of 1965.

St. Julien: So then after that I see here that it was taken over by the University in 1965?

Brodie: They took over on July 1st, 1965.

St. Julien: And you continued to work . . .

Brodie: It was the same job I had with them back there except we dealt in several things with FICUS in addition to the textbooks. When we discontinued the courses when the University took over, they abolished FICUS and there was no longer any need for the part of the job of mine to furnish these textbooks because the University did this. I continued with the University when they took over.

St. Julien: So what do you remember about the school? I understand that there were freshmen overflowing the dormitories?

Brodie: I believe that in the first days of the University, it took responsibility for this place. They were thinking how best can we utilize this facility. This goes down now to the agreement with the federal government to turn over these proposals to the state of Florida, who turned it over to the Board of Regents. We have to use this place for educational purposes for twenty years in order to qualify for the land that we have, some 12 acres that we have down here. So in order to fulfill that, the University looked at the possibilities of what could we do there in the way of education in this fair size facility. Their first idea was to have students here. Of course the agreement with the junior college was such that they could not have freshmen here. This was their source of new students. They would be the most appropriate type of student to put over here in their first year. So in order to achieve this they had to take applicants to USF in Tampa that were not from Pinellas County and they sent them here. I believe there were about 253 of them. We were then on the system and they were here for one year or three trimesters. Then they decided to discontinue that and put in continuing education. So they sent their continuing education group here after that was over. Then in September of 1968, the program that we are now on was begun by Dean Tuttle.

St. Julien: So that was the upper level?

Brodie: Right, the upper level and graduate courses.

St. Julien: So you just continued . . .

Brodie: The same thing. In fact, in 1944 I had occasion to have a job at night time for one night when this office became the cashier's office on that same floor. It seems like a life time deal. I have thoroughly enjoyed this. It has really been nice. I like this place. It is a beautiful place.

St. Julien: What do you remember about the community reaction to getting the University here in this area?

Brodie: My first thoughts about that are that the people in these surroundings were not aware that we were here. It's been a job. I believe that they are still facing that somewhat, the problem of orienting people in this community that we are down here. They have done various things to try to overcome that. The local paper has been cooperative in this to some extent. I think that they are making headway. They have just recently, in the last year, put a person in charge of development. Their job is to keep the tax payers aware of what we are doing here. More and more, Student Affairs is doing more things that are beneficial to the people around here. So it has just been an ongoing thing. If we could call it a problem we had in the beginning of identity, I think we still have that somewhat here.

St. Julien: That is one of the questions that I have been asking people concerning the relationships and I know that you must be very aware of it because of your position. The relationship that we have with the University of Florida or Florida State being a younger university and they are more established and even more so for St. Petersburg because it is a regional campus.

Their relationship with the University of South Florida because you have to worry about who gets what of the appropriations. What is your feeling about the problems that you first had with that and how has it improved or has it even gotten worse?

Brodie: I believe that anytime that you are in an institution that is experiencing some growth there is that problem because there is always a lag between the need for money and when it is appropriated by the legislation, just by the system that we live with here. My views on what we are getting and what we need and how well we are supported probably differs from the other people that you have interviewed. Tampa has great resources and does great things with this. I believe that for what we have here that we have in the past received monies that were adequate. We can always use more. I believe that the support of the people in Tampa has been something that I think we could emulate and be grateful for, because they have done very well by us.

St. Julien: I understand from different people that this campus has had to be real creative in functioning because this is a smaller campus and it doesn't have the facilities that Tampa has and that they have had to utilize a lot of community resources.

Brodie: Over in Tampa having a larger campus and a larger student body they have many more people to work there. They have many departments over on the branch campus. We are kind of faced with this thing of representing each one of those departments with much fewer people. So when we do that we have to assure that each person that works here, they have to be familiar with the operational procedures of the four or five departments. They may be called on to do a wide variety of things. I believe this makes things

more interesting for us down here. I think that is a challenge that we give new employees to learn many things and I really believe while learning these things that sometimes that makes us more functional.

St. Julien: What could you tell us about the development of the library or the bookstore? I know that when the school first started things like this must have been nonexistent.

Brodie: In the beginning, back in 1965, when they decided to put these 253 students here, they said that they were going to need a library. They decided that they didn't have the money to hire a librarian so they would just have an open place where they would place books on shelves. I believe they went over to Haslems and bought 900 books to start with. These were used books and some of them were paperback books. They just stocked the shelves that way for one year or so. I believe we went on that basis of using and borrowing books on their honor to return them. Of course as time went on and as the needs we had were dramatically presented to people in Tampa and they started to support these. Of course we had OPS people to operate a library. They tried to establish some volunteer system. Then they hired a librarian and that way they could just start building their staff there to the level they are having now. Of course they are still advancing here. They are getting everything now on computers. We are doing it that way. So it has just been a meager beginning. It is something that has really grown. It has been very expensive I am sure.

St. Julien: What about physical education or sports? I know that they didn't have that. I can recall talking to someone and they talked about how they would join city leagues for activities.

Brodie: I think in that end that we are very short as a campus. We are unable to offer our students here the kind of activity that I believe that they are due. They have an educational experience that we say we are doing for our students, but we do try to make use of other sponsored activities by the city government and the public. You have to do that in order to have something to offer here. For example, we have no place here to have a physical education class. So what we do is that we take our auditorium and they bring over mats and whatever and fix us about. They have to tear this down every week because everything here, the one big problem in a physical facility, is that it has to be multi-purpose. Almost anything that you look at is multi-purpose here. That hampers things to some extent. I know down in Student Affairs that we have a cafeteria. Just on the other side of the wall there we have an office for an activity supervisor. In our classrooms upstairs in that new building, if you look at them we have three rather large rooms that will hold up to 90 students. They had to make it multi-purpose to serve more classes. We are able to put up some kind of partition in between classes. This is unsatisfactory to many instructors because you can hear through the partitions. We hope that we can correct this. But when we use them, we are going to limit the number of classrooms available. It is very likely that we will turn that into where we have two rooms, we will put it into just one. In order to put up a wall in between where you can't hear through and have two small classrooms. But there is a limit to what you can do in a practical way with being multi-purpose.

St. Julien: So we still have a couple of things to do.

Brodie: I think we will always have these and it will be a very long time in between when the need arises for a building and when you get it. I believe this main building was probably conceived of this way and it took the first almost fourteen years before they ever really got it. When they got this or was about to get this they probably made requests for the new, a phase one and a phase two under construction here. It has come a little sooner than the others, but it had been in the mill for a very long time.

St. Julien: I know that when this school was first started it was before the public schools were integrated. I think they were completely integrated in the mid-'70s? Do you recall any kind of problems with integrating the school when it first started?

Brodie: I don't remember any problems. I'm not aware of any problems with drugs on this campus. This may be, but I'm not aware of it.

St. Julien: I notice more differences on this campus because you have such a wide variety of students. You have students right out of junior college, students who are still working, and students who are retired. Do you think that has added to a more harmonious campus or actually maybe caused a more creative situation in the classroom?

Brodie: I don't know what it is, but so far as I can tell is that this is a harmonious campus and does not have some problems that some of the other campuses have. The problems that I am thinking about here that have occurred over America since the '60s that this probably was as much in small institutions. I don't know why we have been protected from this,

but I'm not aware of it. Maybe I'm just not the person exposed to that here. I remember one time the call came from the police and they just happened to talk to me. It was something about some drug thing. I asked if we had that over here. They said that they weren't aware of it. It was a program or something that they were interested in. Things have gone real well. I remember I was very close friends with a former police sergeant and he had an experience on the Tampa campus. He told me that he walked down the parking lot and he would see windows open and cameras inside of cars and all other things that are valuable that people wouldn't normally carry in their car were there and were untouched. He said that he didn't know what they were doing here to cause this. He thought that they we were really blessed in this way that they didn't have those kinds of problems.

St. Julien: What do you recall about community relations or support for this school?

I have heard that one of the problems that other people see is the fact that they don't have a fine arts department where you have a theater and a music department where you can bring a large amount of community into the school. I know that Student Affairs had alot of lecture series and things where there was people from the community in it, but they still don't seem to feel that that is pulling in enough of the larger area.

Brodie: I think we all respond to questions from the information that we have and maybe I don't have enough information. I had occasion to have lunch with one of the editors of the St. Petersburg Times. We were talking about this thing that you asked regarding community support. I asked him what he thought about it. He had remarked that the university that he attended had great support from the community. He has never seen anything like

that since. I asked him how they did it. He told me that they did that by presenting programs through continuing education and would involve people to come here and take limited courses that may only be one day. It may be at most a week or two. He said that they had offered courses in becoming insurance underwriters. We had done a little of that here, but something more vocational-minded than what we have here. He was thinking that this may help us. He didn't emphasize that too much. I think of things like law enforcement where there are special problems that would arise in that they could have short courses on this to advise other law officers of these various municipalities and within the county here. This may be a way of doing that, but you have to have resources to do this. Not many of those programs will pay their own way. So you have to get money from somewhere. If you don't get it from the participant, which often times is the case, the University would have to support that. One of the things I believe we will find is that in continuing education the Board of Regents has a directive that these courses should be self-sustaining. If the college students here, if their programs have to be self-sustaining, it would be unbearable. They could not pay the fare here. Taking places like Harvard where they have to do this, of course, they get great support from the foundation. I mean a foundation that has millions of dollars where they are drawing the proceeds from this to subsidize a student, where here we use mainly tax payers.

St. Julien: If that becomes a rule, how do you think things like Liberal Arts would suffer as compared to business? Being in this kind of community where they encourage business, how do you feel one college might suffer over the other?

Brodie: If I could back up a second to the fine arts thing that you mentioned. We've had a few courses in fine arts and one of my jobs is to compute the FTE, the full-time equivalents, that comes here. I'm guided by that an awful lot. I think a little bit of the stadium thing that we have here in St. Petersburg and they have been kicking it around politically for a long time. I look over at Al Lang Field that I can see from this campus and I see very little attendance over at their ballgames. When they get a facility that will handle fifty thousand and you have to get at least thirty to break even, I wonder if St. Petersburg really supports this. Do they really have the interest in this that that requires? They are finding out all over America that some of these cities that have had baseball teams don't have this. It is a very expensive thing. I think of the fine arts attendance and the number who register for these courses. To me, at least, as one who just keeps records, I'm not impressed by the number that we've had in this as some others are. Of course our main undertaking here is the College of Business. I don't want to say that this is all we have, we have other things. But we get the enrollment, that is where the interest must be and there must be some reason for that interest. It may be that they can use their skills that they learn here and apply them to making a living. It maybe something of that order. While I am for that sort of thing, I think we have to balance that off with our other commitments to the large number of people who are making rather dramatic demands upon us. This is what we want. We need huge percents and something that will help me. Of course it is a dilemma and a headache for the administrators that make those decisions.

St. Julien: I know that there was a controversy over where to locate the campus when it started to expand and that they had looked at two or three locations besides St. Petersburg. Their decision to keep it in St. Petersburg, how much do you feel that that was the University's decision alone to do that or the influence of the business community of St. Pete to keep it here?

Brodie: I would believe that where a university is located is 90% political every time where you are using funds from the tax payers. I think the politicians are going to make those decisions. I personally don't disagree with being where we are. I do think that I believed that northern Pinellas county, as they refer to it, had the need for higher education the same as that of the people that they have, I believe that we are challenged to do something about that and maybe we should open a branch of a branch or at least offer some counties some classes. Now the University does have some classes in Seminole now, the College of Education does. I see the statistics on that each semester. Maybe we ought to do more of this sort of thing. I am a firm believer that Florida can support and is willing to support higher education where it is really needed. I believe that there is a question of isolating this and identifying it and presenting it to the people who do something about this. I'm really not one to say we should have opened up in mid-county. I don't know about that because I have a friend that works with the University, in fact works with me here. She's been with the University twenty years. She lives in Seminole and she told me the other day that it was just as close for her to Tampa where she works as to come here. In fact they opened an office here last month and I asked her if she was going to work in that office, which is the same office as in Tampa. She said that she wouldn't because it was just as close for her from where she lives to go to Tampa as it is to come down

here. I believe, by and large, by the cost of it that the city of St. Petersburg has supported us. There may have been times, I've read in the paper, where officials around here had to point out to the city officials the need for land, but I think generally they come through with this. I appreciate that as being a citizen of St. Petersburg. I believe they have tried to support this.

St. Julien: Who do you think has given the most support? Has it been the politicians, the business community, or the professional community? Where do you think that support seems to come from first before it filters down . . . ?

Brodie: It seems to me that in my memory of things that the University, when Dr. Mackey was there, he pointed out to the City Council his concerns of branch campuses in St. Petersburg. He did this several times. I believe it starts there where educators see the need for this and they point it out first to the politicians. The politicians then point it out to the business people that have the knowledge of the progress of the community in mind, and I think it is probably an effort of all three working together. I believe we have been supported. When we started to buy land around here they said it wasn't going to be cheap and they would have to buckle up to do this, and I see they are going to have some rather hefty taxes and raises around here. While they have not said this I believe that part of that probably would be for purchases of land and other things they have been faced with.

St. Julien: What kind of problems do you see being in a retirement community? St. Petersburg has historically been known as a retirement community.

Brodie: I guess that when you are dealing with retired people in great numbers, since they are on retirement and generally they are having less money to spend than they had when they worked, I think does effect a person and what he believes others should spend of the money that is contributed to taxes. I believe every segment of America have their needs. I believe one of the needs in this community is to service these people whom we are getting the money from. They have needs. We may want to respond to those more than we have in the past. I don't see that as being detrimental. I remember when I was in the maritime we had occasion to have parades each weekend through the city and people would come and show their approval of what we were doing. Quite a few people did that in St. Petersburg and it was very common for the instructors here to say that they didn't support us down here. I'm not sure that is the case. We got along pretty good. We used alot of tax money and nobody every really objected to it. I believe we have the support here where people are aware of what we are doing. We can always use more and I think we can always grow bigger and do better and offer more things to people, both credit wise and with continuing education. I believe we are doing that.

St. Julien: Do you see a difference in the interaction between the faculty and students? People have stated that when the college was small that it had a family atmosphere and I know that people still have that feeling about this campus. Over your years here, have you seen any kind of difference with the growth of the campus?

Brodie: I think we started out here with 627 in the first semester in 1968. Of course, with dealing with such a small number . . . The College of Education was the first to start the day classes. We had all kinds of

offerings at night. It was a much larger number. We still have that. We have a larger number of students that come at night than come in the daytime. I think dealing with a small number you think you know them more or better. I believe that is the only thing. I believe that over a course of fifteen years that the attitude of people has changed some about how well we know each other. In other words, maybe in 1985 we are not as close to each other as we once were. It may not just be the number, it may be something within the people themselves and how they feel about each other. So far as the people that I know here and that know me, I feel pretty much the same. Somehow I don't have that feeling of being lonesome or whatever you get when this thing is growing too big. I still know a lot of people here and they know me.

St. Julien: Do you recall anything about union organizations? Have you ever had any reason to come into contact with this?

Brodie: No. I know that there are probably unions that represent Career Service and policemen here, but I'm not aware of it. To tell you the truth, if you were to ask me if I knew anyone that was a member of a union or ever has been here, I would say that I didn't know. I don't want you to think that I'm not endorsing unions. They might very well serve a useful purpose. I am aware that about ten years ago that some representatives came and wanted to talk to Physical Plant, that was about a union and we have received instructions on that, that we should discourage these people if we can. We just now had this. I suspect that this will change. We don't have it now.

St. Julien: If you look over the years that you have been here, what would you say have been some of the best or some the worst developments on this campus?

I realize that we have had a series of presidents, so I assume that the direction must have changed and that you can see this as being an advantage or a disadvantage.

Brodie: I believe the one thing that comes to my mind as far as the best advantage of this whole undertaking here over the past twenty years is that a student that graduates from a junior college does not have to leave St. Petersburg to complete his education in many areas. I am talking about the College of Business, College of Education, and Social and Behavioral Sciences. There are many offerings here in those and the people don't have to go anywhere else for credit in order to earn their degree. I believe that is an advantage. As a matter of fact when I moved to St. Petersburg thirty years ago, one of the considerations my wife and I gave this was whether our son would have to go off to college. That didn't happen. This came in time and he graduated from here. I'm glad about that. I think that the course offerings could be expanded and we could include more people in that from St. Petersburg. Another thing is that the ones that don't need a degree or don't want one, I think that this is the place that you can have this in St. Petersburg that was not here. It's here now and I think it can be useful to the citizens of this community. Just recently we were able to offer graduate students in the College of Business a place to get their MBA. They don't have to leave this campus any more. They can come right here and earn it. And they do so. They are very selective of people that can do this, but they have a good group there and it's been sustained now for several years. There are so many areas that this place has developed here, first rate schools that range from Marine Science. They will have a first-rate school here, really. They have received these awards. In order to do this they are

going to have one of the best known schools in Marine Science in America here. I believe the recognition of the St. Petersburg campus in the size and quantity and the scope of it is just a fragment of what it can be. This place is perfect for a university. I think it is really going to grow and I don't mean so much in the number of students and programs. I believe we have other areas coming up. We have the Department of Natural Resources located here. They have three buildings. We probably only have five or six ourselves. I never read about them in the paper and they are doing great work in marine science also and other areas of control so far as marine life is concerned. Those are some of the things that come to my mind.

St. Julien: Thank you very much for talking with us.

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